

NOTES ON AFGHANISTAN AND HER PEOPLE.

BY E. CLARKE.

I. *The Ways into the Country.*—The north-west frontier, which the Prime Minister wishes to rectify because it is not sufficiently scientific, is the line marked out naturally by the mountain-range inclosing the Peshawur valley beyond the Indus and Cabul rivers, which may easily be crossed in winter time by a bridge of boats just below their junction at Attock. The important city of Peshawur has a cantonment for ten or twelve thousand British troops within twenty miles of the Khyber Pass, the best-known and most direct route to the interior of Afghanistan. This is supported by another strong force at Rawul Pindee, on the main road to Jhelum, the nearest railway terminus to which is unhappily 170 miles from Peshawur; and between it and that city are two rivers and numerous streams, most of which are unbridged.

Another entrance to Afghanistan is by the Kohat Pass, from which to Rawul Pindee there is a tolerably well-defined track in the dry season, though after rain it is said to be all but impassable for troops.

A third, lower down the Indus than the two others, at Dera Ghazee Khan, has been rendered impracticable for the present by an unexampled overflow of that river; and as the whole of Upper Scinde is under water, any approach by way of Moultan, the river Chenaab, the Bolan, Miloh, and other passes, would be at present impracticable.

Our advanced outpost is at Quetta, garrisoned by about 1,200 men, but the road to it through Boogtee Derah is a mere mountain-path, utterly unfit for the passage of wheeled artillery. It is the road which must be used for the reinforcements of this handful of soldiers. From Quetta an attack on Kandahar might be made, although we should have to face and surmount considerable engineering difficulties. The labor of dragging all that is necessary for even a small body of men over a height of more than 13,000 feet is of course enormous.

These are only a few of the best known and most available roads over the rocky

and inhospitable barriers between us and Afghanistan. Besides them, there is one by Tal Chhotyali, to the north of the Bolan, which is believed to be tolerably easy, and leads direct into the Peshin valley; there is land and water communication by the Cabul river and its banks from Jellalabad to the Momund frontier by Shah Moosah Khail; there is a pass leading from the Swat country to Fort Abazie; and there are sheep or goat-tracks innumerable, by which the hill tribes descend on their frequent forays.

II. *The Country and its Products.*—The sources of authentic information about the Afghans are very few, and those who know them best, depend least on what they say about themselves. Cabul proper is the mountainous region north of Ghuzni and the White Mountains, or Sufaid Koh, and is bounded westward by the Hazarah country, and on the east by Abba Sin, the "Father of Rivers," known to us as the Indus. Adjoining it is the province of Zabulistan or Khorassan, the "Land of the Sun," extending from the snow-clad peaks of Ghor and Hazarah, southward to the Khanate of Khelat, with the mountains of Solomon on the east, and Persia on the west. These two districts constitute the modern kingdom of Afghanistan, which may be roughly stated to be some 460 miles long from north to south, and 430 miles from east to west; say 200,000 square miles, about equal in size to France which has 204,000, or to Germany which has 212,000 square miles. Great Britain contains 90,000, and Ireland about 30,000, square miles. Its distinguishing features are the three mountain-chains that traverse it from right to left, the central range being the Hindoo Koosh, which terminates in the Koh-i-Baba—a huge mass north-west of and near the city of Cabul, whose loftiest peak, 18,000 feet high, is covered with perpetual snow. North of this range runs the Sufaid Koh, terminating just above Herat, and south of it runs the Siah Koh.

The land is well watered everywhere,

though its rivers are few, and none of them reach the sea. The principal river is the Cabul, which rises in the mountains near the city from which it takes its name, receiving the tributary waters of various streams from Kafistan, Swat, and the north, and flowing eastward past Jellalabad through the Khyber Pass into British territory, where it falls into the Indus at Attock. The Kuram runs in the same direction, and the government of India has sometimes contemplated marching upon Afghanistan by following its course under the shelter of the Sufaid Koh mountains until it reaches a point commanding both the cities of Ghuzni and Cabul. The Murghab, a clear and rapid mountain stream, rising in the Sufaid Koh, flows northward to Merv, at a short distance from which it loses itself in the sandy wastes of Khiva, its waters having previously been drawn off in many canals for the purpose of irrigation. The Hari Rood in like manner supplies canals which water all the plain of Herat. The Helmund, which would have to be crossed by an army marching through the Bolan Pass on Herat, is about a mile wide in early summer, when it is swollen by the melting of the snows; but at its lowest levels late in April and the beginning of May it is split up into many small streams, none of them more than three-and-a-half feet deep. It rises in the southern slopes of the Koh-i-Baba behind Cabul, and after running south about 100 miles to Girishk, turns suddenly westward, and flows about the same distance before emerging into Sistan, where it takes a tortuous north-westerly direction, forming a delta of exceedingly fertile arable land, the produce of which is more than sufficient for home consumption. As the fields are separated by quick-set hedges, the plain has a familiar, almost an English, aspect.

As may be imagined, there are all varieties of climates. In Khorassan the summer heat is scorching, and the temperature is usually very high in the valleys. The winters in Cabul and the surrounding district are so severe that from the beginning of December the roads are choked with snow, and traffic and business is at a complete standstill. Between the cold and hot seasons there is

a clearly-defined autumn and spring, such as we have in Europe.

The two principal cities are Cabul and Kandahar. Native tradition claims an antiquity of six thousand years for the former, as well as the doubtful distinction of being the precise spot on which Lucifer alighted when he fell from heaven. The present city was erected by Mahmud, and before the entrance of the British army in 1842 it was populous and thriving, full of bazaars, and resounding with the hum of life and business.

Kandahar is supposed to have been built originally by Alexander the Great, but since his time it has been twice overthrown by earthquakes, or abandoned for new sites. It has six gates and four principal streets, which meet in the middle of the town. The ramparts measure about four miles in circumference. The principal object of interest is the temple or shrine of Ahmed Khan, the "blameless king" of his nation, whose learning, sanctity, virtues, and victories have never been disputed either by friends or foes. At the foot of the hills, to the north of the city, is a gold mine, which was discovered in 1860 by a shepherd boy. The ground was claimed as crown property, and has been profitably worked in a roughly primitive manner ever since.

Grains and fruits of almost every kind grow in one part or another of Afghanistan. Herat is the most fertile province, and produces two harvests every year, the average yield of which is forty-fold, while cattle are often pastured where corn might grow if it were wanted. Many of the hills and mountains are cultivated to a considerable height with patches of grain, or fruit-trees planted in terraces. More might be done in this way but for the poverty of the rainfall and the impossibility of sinking wells in such elevated situations. Sistan contains a great deal of rich alluvial soil. All sorts of fruits known in Europe flourish, though we hear nothing of those peculiar to the tropics. Tamarind-trees are everywhere, and mulberry-trees abound, the white variety being the commonest. The fruit is used not only fresh but dried, made into cakes, and ground into powder. The gardens of Cabul are noted for apples, pears, quinces, peaches, apricots, pomegran-

ates, and figs. Grapes are abundant, large quantities being dried for raisins or exported unripe to distant parts of India, besides being used for wine, the staple manufacture of Kafiristan. Pistachionuts are plentiful, and are exported principally by way of Persia. Dates and lemons grow in the valley of Jellalabad. Rice is cultivated only along the river banks; wheat, maize, barley, and millet are the principal food of the people. Madder is largely grown for export, rhubarb for the oil which is expressed from it, and Indian hemp and tobacco for home consumption.

The breeding of cattle is principally carried on by the nomadic tribes, and that of horses by the Beloochees. Camels and dromedaries are the usual beasts of burden. Sheep and goats are very numerous, and their wool is partly exported and partly manufactured at home into Persian carpets and Herat felts. The mineral wealth of the country, which is little known or developed, includes gold, silver, copper, iron, lead, and antimony. Sulphur, saltpetre, salammoniac, and salt are also found and easily worked.

III. *The People*.—We have said nothing as yet of the inhabitants. Some old Indian officers call them "niggers," or "demi-savages." Yet most of them have fine features and a splendid physique. They are said to call themselves "Beni-Israel," and to trace their descent from King Saul. Their Hebrew physiognomy, the division into tribes bearing the familiar appellations of Israel, Jusef, and Ibrahim, their custom of avenging blood, and of changing their possessions every fortieth year (a possible corruption of the Jubilee), make the hypothesis at least interesting. The hill tribes who inhabit the borders are people whose hand is against every man, and though some of them are nominally subject to the Ameer, there is no real suzerain, and no common national feeling, unless it be the universal hostility to the "Feringhee," or foreigner. These "Pathâns," as they are usually called, speak the Pushtoo language, while the name of Afghan includes all the inhabitants. Their religion is of the kind which, after rendering to Allah the prayers, ablutions, and fasts supposed to be His due, leaves them free to indulge their natural instincts. The women, who

are usually pretty, are mere household drudges. They are often, however, the occasion of a relentless blood-feud, the prosecution of which through long years is looked upon as a religious duty.

One of their institutions is the "Hoojra," a sort of club where the male inhabitants of a village assemble to smoke and gossip. The spot chosen is generally the foot of a large tree in a central position, with water at hand. Here travellers are received and entertained, the *habitués* subscribing the food. The regular attendant of each Hoojra frequently entertains these evening gatherings by his skill in music. He has to keep the place clean and tidy, to wait on visitors, to fill their pipes, &c., &c., and he is paid in kind by a certain portion of grain at harvest-time, and a fee at every wedding. The national weapons are matchlocks of a clumsy make, fired by a cotton match, and something like the old "Brown Bess;" swords, the weight and sharpness of which make them deadly at close quarters, and heavy murderous knives and daggers. The thievish propensities of the borderers have, however, provided them with a tolerable number of English weapons, to the superiority of which they are fully alive. In war, each man provides and carries his own commissariat, which, like that of the Scotch armies, who used to make such frequent inroads into England, consists of a bag of corn-meal. The Afghans add a mat to their baggage.

The best-known border tribes are the Afreedis and Wuzerees, each of which are divided into many clans; then there are the Bonairs, Swâtees, Black Mountaineers, the Orukzyes, Momunds, Khutuks, Yusufzyes, Kuzrânees, Bozdars, Buttunees, and Belooches. Most of them have a bad reputation for cunning and faithlessness, and have been pestilent neighbors to the Anglo-Indian authorities; but those who have been enrolled among the British forces have proved themselves brave and loyal. Faithful to their salt among themselves, where there is no blood-feud in the way, they are perhaps not so bad as they are painted. They are believed to number altogether some 170,000 men, but they are always at strife between themselves, and are never likely to unite against a common foe.

Commerce with India is almost exclusively carried on by the "Powindahs," or travelling merchants, who, in former times, conducted their "kāfilahs" from Ghuzni to Delhi, Agra, and Calcutta, but now avail themselves of the railway which they reach at Lahore or Moultan, shortening their journey by several weeks.

The inhabitants of the interior of Afghanistan do not seclude their women so much as in other Mohammedan countries. A few in the higher classes can read, but writing is looked upon as a questionable and dangerous accomplishment. Covered with long white mantle, and closely veiled, these ladies may be seen in the bazaars, or riding on horseback behind their husbands, or going in company with their female friends to some retired spot in the country, where they can cast aside their head-gear and enjoy freedom and fresh air.

Cookery attains the dignity of a fine art in Cabul, and confectionery is made in large quantities. It is the custom to send a "zujāfat," or ready-cooked dinner, which comprises an enormous number of dishes, to distinguished strangers. The *pièce de résistance* is invariably a "pulāo"—that is to say, a whole sheep stuffed with pistachio-nuts, almonds, raisins, dried apricots, and preserved plums, and concealed under a mountain of boiled rice mixed with caraway, cardamum, and pomegranate seeds. It is succeeded by a multiplicity of sweet and sour preserves, candies, sherbets, and several kinds of bread. The crucial native test for Afghan cookery is the quantity and quality of the melted butter or fat of which it is the vehicle. The more rancid the grease, the better it is liked, particularly by the peasantry and the nomadic races, three or four of whom will consume the tail of a *dumba* sheep, weighing eighteen pounds, and consisting of pure fat, at a single meal. The *Afghan chef d'œuvre* to English pal-

ates is the roasting of a fowl. The toughest and oldest chanticleer that ever crowed comes to table plump, juicy, tender, and well-flavored, for he has been slowly cooked over live embers, perpetually turned over, and lavishly basted with clarified butter. Game is plentiful in many parts of the country, and makes a pleasant change in the bill of fare. Hares, black-legged partridges, wild-duck, and blue-pigeons; are easily attainable, and the Afghans are lovers of sport and admire a good shot. Larger game are wolves, leopards, and bears. Snakes and pythons abound in some of the forests; land tortoises are sometimes met with.

Some of the wandering tribes contrive to live very comfortably in their *kizhdi*, or black tents. One of these tents, belonging to the Kākarrs, was visited by an English party, and found to be thirty feet long by fifteen wide, supported in the centre by slim poles, seven feet high, and at the sides by others, four feet in height, across which were passed thin ribs of wood. Over this framework was stretched a single sheet of tough, waterproof black hair-cloth, woven in lengths two yards in width and sewn together. The interior was divided into two portions by a row of sacks of corn, the one excavated two feet deep for the accommodation of the camels, oxen, goats, sheep, and poultry, and the other clean-swept and garnished for the habitation of three women, two men, and two boys, all of whom were healthy and well-favored. In the centre was a circular pit for fire, the smoke of which had to find its way out as best it might. Dirt and filth of the most disgusting kind are allowed to collect outside the houses, but thanks to the climate and their splendid constitutions, the inhabitants do not seem to suffer from their frank defiance of all sanitary laws.—*Macmillan's Magazine*.